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## TOWARD CHILDHOOD

Backward, O Time, and for a single hour  
Make a small child of him who stands before us  
At the advanced age of seventy-five—  
Leander M. Coggsowell, multimillionaire.

In days when gross wealth drugs the very atmosphere,  
It would be vain to guard these present lines from its insidi-  
ous approach.  
Shall I seem to overdo  
If I give Mr. C. one hundred millions?  
Very well; they're his.

He lives today in semi-retirement,  
And has forgotten partly how the money came;  
Completely so, if asked officially.  
Others have now bent their backs to the great burden;  
He no longer keeps tab, he tells us, on the workings of the  
vast machine.

He buys now and then a picture, a coronet, a castle;  
He smiles impartially on the great and on the small,  
On the heedless and on the inquisitive,  
Reads detective stories,  
And plays croquet.

Now let us make him a little younger.  
We strip him first of his bland leisure

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And of his more puerile interests.  
Five years ago—yes, even less—  
He was aflame to found, to furnish, to fill  
His great museum,  
He the modern Medici—Cosimo and Lorenzo in one.  
Books, manuscripts, madonnas, choked his days;  
Art and learning walked captive at his heels.

But Cæsar never grew so great, you say,  
Upon such meat as that?  
Of course not. There was a previous period;  
A phantasmagoric jumble of varied interests  
Filled the public air; all was kept aloft  
By superhuman skill, and all was juggled  
Just a bit too swiftly for the questioning eye to follow—  
Even for the interested orb  
Of the Uncle of us all:  
Banks, foundries, railways, tanks, stock market, state leg-  
islatures, what you will;  
Everything brought about with suave and Mephistophelean  
mien  
By the great thaumaturge,  
While deft assistants at the lesser tables  
Passed on the properties and dressed the scene.

Peeling away still further from our friend  
His years, dexterity and grandeur,  
We find him on a lower stage,

*Toward Childhood*

Before a poorer audience,  
Doing less skilfully and on a smaller scale  
The tricks that made the man—himself.  
It seems, viewed restrospectively, a mere rehearsal  
Of his immense Performance.  
Here, industrious, thrifty and alert  
(To give his qualities their better names),  
He practiced, in semi-privacy and with no possibility of  
praise,  
The qualities he lauded, later,  
In pamphlets and addresses aimed at the nation's youth.

Back still farther:  
No company now; no firm;  
Just a lone young individual,  
Of parentage blent and non-distinguished, let us say,  
With a young helpmate of his own kind;  
Both struggling together for a foothold,  
Both putting forth their strained endeavors  
To feed and clothe a little flock,  
And to "get on."

Next go his wife and children.  
We have left now only a young clerk or handy-man,  
Of lingo semi-rustic, semi-foreign, semi-citified, quite as you  
like;  
Moling away beneath the surface,  
Yet coming up, at intervals,

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To see the Main Chance shining in the sky;  
Holding his own, and more, against all youthful rivals,  
And shaping vigorously the grand ideals  
Which, later, were to fire his heart—and ours.

Next we deprive him of his office-stool,  
Or of his chance to labor hardily out in the sheds.  
He's but a boy at school—  
Quick, quick, with slate and pencil;  
Sharp, sharp, among the playground's crowd.

Next knee-trousers go.  
We have a child of four in laughable habiliments  
Preserved by some uncouth disciple of Daguerre,  
And later shown, in half-tones,  
For the derisive adoration of the world;  
But with a look, sly and determined, in the eyes,  
Which promises much.

Now but an infant-in-arms,  
Borne in long convoluted skirts.  
"Oh, what a forehead!" cries a visiting aunt,  
Pushing the frilled cap back.  
And, kissing such brows, mothers have often said with awe,  
"He may be president."

Lastly, a new-born babe,  
Hugged close within a home

*Toward Childhood*

On some elm-shaded street,  
Or in some slattern village farther west,  
Or in some stony cabin far beyond our bounds.

Can we go on?  
Yes, with Wordsworth, who has Intimations,  
And who may have bestowed on him  
Long streamers of supernal—or infernal—glory;  
Or with Kant, who has Innate Ideas,  
And who may well have packed the baby full  
Of pre-accumulated notions and experiences;  
Or with Galton, who cracks up Heredity,  
And who may have presented a complete outfit  
Of traits passed on from linked forefathers;  
Or with Taine, who comes out strongly for Environment,  
And who perhaps decreed our babe should be  
Entirely what Surroundings made him.  
Modern opinion and current fashion  
May favor this last notion still.

Thus our new-born hero came at once  
Within a range of influences and waiting opportunities  
Which caused his Life to follow  
As easily and inevitably  
As a corollary upon a theorem proved—  
As naturally as some prepotent cloud,  
Careering through the littered heavens,  
Helps weave strange, disconcerting patterns on earth's fields.

POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

H'm! Are we not all clouds together?—  
Minor cirri, dumpy cumuli,  
Multitudinous shreds of vapor,  
Rosy or gray,  
That float or drive about in tiny tatters;  
And some fixed fault within the national sky  
Prevents a proper taming of our thunder-heads.  
We wait, and no high Cloud-Compeller comes  
To help us master our Preponderates.

*Henry B. Fuller*